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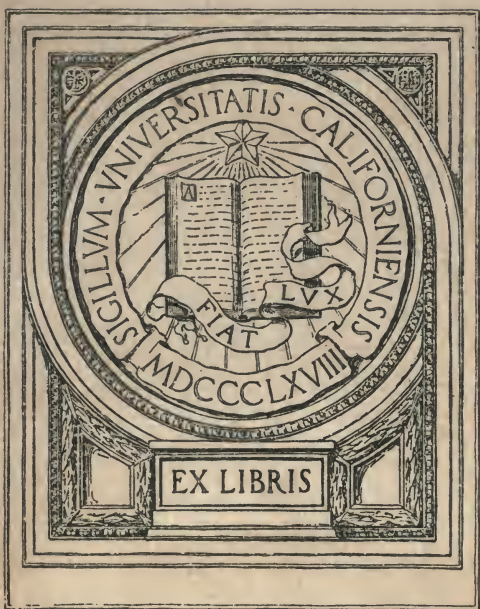


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# THE AGE OF HOMER.

BY

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## THE AGE OF HOMER.

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Mr. Paley and Mr. Sayce have put forward their views with regard to the late age of the Homeric poems (that is, of the texts of the Iliad and the Odyssey as we now have them) from a critical examination of their language. I would here wish to express in a few notes my further doubts with regard to the early date of the Homeric poems founded on the knowledge they evince of the art of a late date.

Before discussing the date of the art as it appears in the poems, I shall endeavour to point out some evidences of the rudeness and imperfection of Greek civilization and language in the seventh century, about a century and a half after the supposed date of Homer.

I must in the first place confess myself a thorough sceptic with regard to the early date usually assigned to the Iliad in its present form, and I accept the theories so convincingly put forward by Mr. Paley. The mythology, the art and science, the language appear far too advanced for an early period of literature. The mythology is too grand; the conceptions too magnificent for that period; the archaisms seem too often unreal, imitative and affected; besides, the arts which would have been required to carry out the conception of the Shield of Achilles would have been enough to task the genius of a Phidias.

From what we know of the rudeness of Greek art in the seventh and sixth centuries B.C., there is every reason to believe



the state of civilization was in an analogous rude state. Thucydides considered the really primitive state, the veritable "juventus" of Hellenism, to be a state of barbarism, in which the Greeks lived chiefly by piracy; indeed Thucydides expressly writes, "In many respects one might show that the ancient Greeks lived in a manner similar to the barbarians of the present age," and this state must have existed only a little earlier than the seventh century. Hence to attribute the refined and chivalric civilization as depicted in the Homeric poems to the ninth, much more to the date of the supposed war, the twelfth century B.C., is manifestly absurd. Before we can obtain a correct idea of the early state of Greece, the whole system of myths of the so-called heroic age, which are all essentially legends—fictions, must be swept away. The myths of Pelops, Dardanus, Atreus, Agamemnon, "creatures of legends," as Mr. Grote truly calls them, and the Trojan War, have as little to do with genuine Greek history as Brutus and his Trojans, Cymbeline, King Lear, in England, Partholamus, Nemedius, and the Tuatha de Danaans in Ireland, have to do with the genuine histories of England or Ireland. The so-called heroic age in Greece was in reality a rude and barbarous age, an age of fighting and cruelty, not of virtue, eloquence, sentiment, or respect for women. When these myths are swept away, we may then trace out the genuine story of the early period of Greek nationality which does not begin before the eighth century B.C.

From the analogy with the history of other nations, the early Greek people must have passed through a rude and barbarous stage, and of this confirmatory evidence has been found in the numerous examples of stone implements which have been discovered in many parts of Greece. It is an established fact that all nations gradually emerged from a primitive barbarous state; and we have evidence that the Greeks of the seventh century were not more advanced than the rest. It is, therefore, an inevitable conclusion that the Greeks of the centuries before the seventh must have been in a ruder and more barbarous state.



According to Dodwell, the earliest inhabitants of Greece, the Dryopes, Caucones, Aones, Leleges, were uncultivated savages, who made a casual and temporary residence wherever they were attracted by the fertility of the soil, the abundance of water, or by considerations of weal, security, and protection. These were evidently the Greeks in their early hunting phase, of which Mr. Finlay has discovered such important proofs in the number of obsidian arrow-heads found everywhere in the country. "It is admitted by all writers," Sir John Stoddart observes, "that the original inhabitants of Greece were mere savages, feeding on acorns, living in caves, and clothing themselves in skins of beasts."

The Pelasgi, who, according to Strabo, were an ancient race which prevailed throughout all Greece, were a barbarous tribe. There are sufficient grounds for believing they were the original Greek race. The Pelasgians of Arcadia, Greek tradition tells us, dwelt in rude huts, and clothed themselves in skins, while the Pelasgians of Athens are described as originally plunged in the grossest barbarism; "other traditions," writes Bishop Thirlwall, "not so liable to distrust, concur in assigning tillage and useful arts to the Pelasgians. It is not an improbable conjecture," he adds, "that the genuine and most ancient form of the native name was expressive of their agricultural character." Lord Lytton writes (*Athens I*, 99), "The history of the early period in Greece was the history of the human race—it was the gradual passage of men from a barbarous state to the dawn of civilization."

There is the strongest probability in favour of the view that there was no art (properly so called) in Greece in the ninth century. The earliest attempts at art, or representations of the human figure, do not appear before the seventh century. Before that age the presence of a god was indicated in a manner akin to the "Fetish" of the African, by the simplest and most shapeless objects, such as roughly hewn blocks and simple pillars of wood or stone. The first attempt at representation consisted in fashioning a block of stone or wood into some semblance of the human form,

and this rude attempt constituted a divinity, and was styled ξόανον. Of this primitive form were the Venus of Cyprus, the Cupid of Thespiæ; the Juno of Argos was fashioned in a similar rude manner from the trunk of a wild pear. These attempts were little more than shapeless blocks, with the head, arms, and legs scarcely defined.

From what we know of Greek art in the sixth century, the sculptures of Selinus, the Athene of Endœus, the bas-reliefs of the Harpy monuments; it was in a very rude and imperfect state. The earliest record we have of any artists who executed works in marble is of Dipœnus and Scyllis (50th Olympiad—580 B.C.) The lentoid gems which are found scattered among the tombs of Greece and the Archipelago, and which exhibit the earliest and rudest form of Greek art, cannot be dated earlier than the seventh century B.C. All afford evidence that Greek art in the seventh century was of the most primitive and rudest description. It is therefore *impossible* that the art exhibited in the shield of Achilles could represent the art of the ninth century, the period usually assigned to Homer. The pottery of the seventh century, which is in the rudest and most primitive style, bears witness to an analogous rude state of civilization in that age.

The early Greek inscriptions tell us the same tale of the rudeness of the Greek language in the seventh and sixth centuries. As Mr. Grote admits, the traces of writing in Greece, even in the seventh century B.C., are exceedingly trifling. The early inscriptions are rude and unskilfully executed. The Sigeian inscription, which is supposed to date from the sixth century, is in *boustrophedon*, one of the rudest styles of writing. The Abou-Simbel inscription (of the middle of the seventh century) shows the Greek language was still in a very imperfect state, and in this inscription, Mr. Newton writes, "we have a cardinal example of Greek writing used by the Ionian and Dorian settlers in Asia Minor about the beginning of the sixth century." The letters of the inscription on the Burgon vase are in a very archaic form from right to left, its date being about 500 B.C. The inscription in *boustrophedon* on the

seated figures at Branchidæ, bear further witness to the rudeness and imperfection of the Greek language in the beginning of the sixth century B.C.

Professor Sayce remarks (Academy, March 2, 1878), "With all the evidence of Grecian intercourse with the East, and more especially with the Phœnicians, it may seem strange that nothing like writing has been met with in the late discoveries in the rock tombs of Spata." This is a further proof of the late use of writing in Greece, and consequently of imperfect civilization at this early period.

The Homeric poems speak constantly of gold as being locked up in treasures, and used in large quantities for the purposes of ornament, but, as Mr. Murray remarks (Greek Sculpture, p. 30), "all this poetic gold could never have been justified by the actual possessions of Homer's time (i. e. of the ninth century), even admitting to the full extent the active commerce with the East indicated in the poems. In Greece proper it is known that in the earliest historic period gold hardly existed, whilst so late comparatively as the 70th Olympiad (500 B.C.) it was a great rarity."

Before the sixth century in Greece the temples were wooden structures and the altars of the rudest description, while the time-hallowed idol was sometimes preserved in a hollow tree.

All these evidences go to prove the rude state of Greek civilization, as far as we can judge from its art, pottery, and language, prior to the seventh century B.C.; and can we suppose that if the civilization and the language of Greece were in such a rude and imperfect state in the seventh century as the above evidences show, that such a poem as the Iliad, of the most elaborate structure, so refined in diction, so perfect in composition, "so largely artificial, imitative, replete with Atticisms and modernisms," as Mr. Paley writes, could have been composed in the ninth century—that is, over 200 years before the alleged dates of the Abou-Simbel and Sigeon inscriptions?

Having pointed out the great probability of there being a rude

and barbarous state in Greece in the eighth and seventh centuries, and hence drawing the natural conclusion that such refined customs and chivalrous manners as we find them in the Iliad could never have existed in the ninth century, and still less in the twelfth century, the age of the so-called Trojan war; we now turn to discuss the development of the Homeric poems themselves.

There must have been before the time of the Homeric poems, some bards or minstrels (*aiidoi*), who composed legendary poems of gods and heroes, and related brave deeds of war, such a one was Demodocus in the Odyssey, who sang the fall of Ilium. Hesiod accurately describes the duties of the *aiidoi* in the following words:—

ἰοιδὸς

Μουσάων θεραπῶν κλεῖα προτέρων ἀνθρώπων  
ὑμνήσῃ μακάρας τε θεοὺς οἳ Ὀλυμπον ἔχουσιν.

These songs, sung to the harp by minstrels or recited by rhapsodists, were the beginnings out of which Epic poetry was slowly shaped by a long line of poets.\*

In poetry, as in art, there must have been rude beginnings, a gradual growth. The earliest forms of the war songs or sacred hymns were of a lyric character, for the lyric is the natural and spontaneous outcome of the poetic feelings of a people in their early stage. Lyric poems formed the popular poetry of the early ages. Productions of the metrical order, whether hymns in praise of their gods, or poems recording the genealogy and exploits of their heroes, were the natural offspring of this age.

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\* The duties of the *aoidos* and the rhapsodist were distinct, as Mr. Grote has pointed out. "The rhapsodes, the successors of the primitive *aoidoi* or bards, seem to have been distinguished from them by the discontinuance of all musical accompaniment. Originally the bard sang, enlivening the song with occasional touches of the simple four-stringed harp: his successor the rhapsode recited, holding in his hand nothing but a branch of laurel, and depending for effect upon voice and manner—a species of musical and rhythmical declamation." Thus the *aoidos* or bard was the original composer of the poems, while rhapsode was only the reciter of these poems.



In the early culture of all nations there is a tendency of the human mind to give spontaneous utterance to poetic thoughts and feelings. The poetic element is more prominent in the early period of a people than at any other age,—the youthful freshness of the nation giving vent to its joyous feelings in spontaneous verse. It was an age in which the art of writing was unknown, and memory constituted the sole means of transmitting knowledge. Writing was evidently only introduced when historical composition began to assume an importance.\* Epic poetry must have had its stages of development before it reached its culminating point. An Epic poem, such as the *Iliad*, could not have been produced in full and complete perfection, like Minerva in complete armour from the brain of Jupiter, without there being some earlier poems which led up to it. “No art,” writes Col. Mure, “arrives at perfection by a single effort, and there is great truth in the remark of Cicero, that as there were men of valour before Agamemnon there must have been poems of considerable bulk before the *Iliad*.”

Earlier lays, or metrical ballads of an epic character, must have existed, which formed the groundwork out of which sprang the later epics. My view with regard to the origin and development of the Homeric poems is this:—About the eighth or seventh centuries B.C. a number of wandering bards, *aoidoi*, went about the country, who composed for the entertainment of their hearers at feasts and other special occasions, short poems relating the renowned deeds of heroes, and also myths of the gods, in epic verse. Homer was perhaps one of these *aoidoi* who first invented or adapted for continuous narrative the hexameter, or epic verse, and hence all those poems in that verse were attributed to him. At a later period—about the sixth century

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\* See Mr. Paley’s “*Bibliographia Græca*,” in which he shows that a written Greek Literature came in at a much later period than has commonly been supposed.

—these poems were recited at public places by rhapsodists,\* who connected them together. Still later—in the fifth century B.C.—modernized versions of them were produced, and many additions made to them. These last are the poems of Homer we now possess.† The poems were evidently handed down orally, and were not committed to writing until the age of Pericles, when a *reading* public first appeared.

The poems which constituted the entire tale of Troy presented a number of myths, narrating events before, during, and after the siege, and formed a long series composed by different poets, *oidoi*, but all which went under the name‡ of “Homer.” The Cypria brought down the early mythic period to the opening of the Iliad. The Æthiopis, Lesser Iliad, Ilii Persis, and Nostoi filled up the space between the conclusion of the Iliad and the commencement of the Odyssey. “The Ilias of Homer,” as Dr. Birch writes, “contained only a fractional portion of the war of Troy, and the whole story of Ilium was not sung by any single bard or poet.”

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\* In the bas-relief in the British Museum representing the Apotheosis of Homer is a figure of a man, raised on a pedestal, standing in front of a tripod: he holds a scroll in his right hand. According to Salmasius, this is Cinaethus Chius, who was the first who recited the poems of Homer as a rhapsodist about the 69th Olympiad (504 B.C.) The Homeric Hymn to Apollo has been attributed to this rhapsodist.

† Mr. Paley has pointed out the important and very significant fact, that Pindar and the Tragicists had quite a different “Homer,” and that the first Greek author who shows a knowledge of our Homeric texts is Plato, whose writings date later than B.C. 400.

‡ That the Homeric poems were the result of the composition of different poets has been strongly objected to by some. That, however, several minds might engage on the same subject, and exhibit a harmony and unity of design, we have an instance in the frieze of the Parthenon. This series of compositions was, as is well known, the result of the co-operation of numerous sculptors, who were not all of equal merit, and this is evinced by difference of execution and design. Notwithstanding this, this continuous frieze exhibits a unity of design, and a harmony of composition, not in any way marred by the slight differences in execution and design. Besides, we may readily grant that the literary compilation we call “Homer” was really the work of one late but unknown compiler.



“The subjects,” Col. Mure writes, “of the individual poems which, by reference to any valid authority, possess claims to a place in the series, appear to have been limited to the Trojan and Theban wars; with the more important collateral vicissitudes of Troic or Bœotian history.” He thus gives the sequence of the epic cycle:—Titanomachia, Europia, Œdipodia, Thebais, Epigoni, Œchalia, Cypria, (Iliad), Æthiopis, Little Iliad, Ilii Persis, Nostoi, (Odyssey), Telegonia. In the Iliad and Odyssey being alone handed down of this grand epic cycle of poems, we have an important instance of the survival of the fittest, for these, as the latest and most polished compositions, came to be regarded alone as Homer, and all other epics as spurious. Our Homer had taken a written and literary form when the earlier epics, used by Pindar and the Tragic, were still orally recited, and had begun to lose their popularity in an age of readers rather than hearers.

The Homeric poems, then, the Iliad and Odyssey, are in every probability later versions of more ancient ballads, the compilations of older poems at a later age, and the last results of a slowly growing national epic. Even in far earlier times than the age of Homer, we find it has been the custom to compile and string together separate and independent poems of earlier date, so as to form one whole. Mr. George Smith writes: “The great Izdubar epic is a redaction of a number of independent poems of earlier date, the thread which runs through the whole and connects it together being the adventures of Izdubar. The epic was probably put together in its present form about 2000 years B.C.” It appears to me putting the cart before the horse, placing epic poetry before ballad poetry: we may as well place the tragic drama before the Dithyramb. As Messrs. Butcher and Lang write, “Homer is not a really primitive poet, but comes at the end, not at the beginning, of a great poetical development.”

In its present form the Iliad cannot be older than the fifth century, and comparative philology shows a good portion of it must be later still. “The books,” writes Mr. Harrison, “known

to us under the authorship of Homer, did not constitute the Homer of ancient Greece. Large portions of it existed before Herodotus' time, but they were not thrown into their final form much earlier than the time of Plato, who died a hundred years after Herodotus." When Herodotus speaks of Homer it was doubtless the older Homer he referred to, the original songs and rhapsodies from which our Homer was derived. We meet an analogous case in Sir P. Sidney, when alluding to the ballad of Chevy Chase as "stirring like a trumpet," it was in reality to the old ballad he referred, not to the modern version.

The present Iliad is thus most probably a later version, dilated by successive additions, of a poem of an older poet, as the Palamon and Arcite of Dryden is a later version of a poem by an older poet, Chaucer. The only difference is, in England we have the original poem of the older poet, while in Greece the original poem is lost.

"A close examination of the language of Homer," writes Mr. Sayce in his Appendix to Mahaffy's Greek Literature, "shows that it is a mosaic in which words belonging to different ages and three different dialects—Æolic, Ionic, and Attic—are mixed together in such a way as to prove it to be an artificial dialect, never really spoken by the people, but slowly elaborated by successive generations of poets for the needs of epic composition."

In his paper on "Dialects in the language of Homer," he further writes: "At the time I wrote the Appendix to Professor Mahaffy's volume I still thought it possible to maintain that the Homeric language in its present form belonged in substance to the oldest phase of the Ionic dialect: I cannot do so any longer. The marks of conventionality and modernism are too numerous and interpenetrating to be ignored, and I cannot resist the cumulative force of the 'Periklean' atticisms which Professor Paley has brought forward. Much, as I now see, that is usually termed archaic is rather archaistic,—metrical necessity and the affectation of antiquity largely dominating the choice of words and forms. Can anyone read Homer and Apollonius Rhodius together without

prepossessions and prejudice, and then say that the language used in the two works is separated by a wide interval of time? Of course we are told that Apollonius Rhodius was an 'imitator,' but how do we know that Homer was not one too? If we would rightly understand the epic dialect, I believe we must regard the language of Homer, not as a form of the Old Ionic, or as a model for later writers, but *in its present form* as the last embodiment of an artificial dialect, whose roots go back to the lost poems of ancient Æolis, and which was nurtured and moulded by generation after generation of Ionic poets through long periods of time." "Subsequent study and reflection have brought me more and more over to Professor Paley's view, and I find it increasingly difficult to believe that the Homeric dialect *in its present form* can claim a much greater antiquity than the Periclean era."

The language of the poems shows that, like all other national epics, they are a slow growth, embodying archaic forms and words, Æolisms, Old Ionicisms, Atticisms, and apparently even Alexandricisms, side by side, and along with these we find words and forms based on a false analogy, and due to the mistaken interpretation by the rhapsodists of old formulæ, the meaning of which had been forgotten. But modernisms peep out in other ways. Thus the nine muses are referred to (Od. 24, 60), implying a knowledge of Tragedy, Comedy, History, etc.; as well as the decades of the Attic month (Od. 14, 161—4), and the Erectheum of Pericles (Od. 7, 81).

Mr. Peile, in his "Greek and Latin Etymology," page 29, adopts the same view: "Mr. Paley, in his introduction to the Iliad, has made it exceedingly probable that the Homeric poems, in their present form, have no claim to their supposed age; but that they were combined at a late date from a very much larger stock of pre-existent materials. This conclusion is completely supported by the language of the poems. The forms of the words bear the impress of a school of poets who were writing in a language, not that spoken in their day, but one containing many archaic forms, and many others formed on their model, which

were probably never used at all in actual life. This has been clearly pointed out by Curtius; and 'it is certain,' as he says, 'that this dialect is the production of a conventional minstrel at an age which preserved a number of very old forms and sounds regarded as in process of extinction; but at the same time availed itself of many formations of later date and evidently in contemporary use.' It is clear, then, that though we may find many old forms here, we find no genuine Ionic dialect."

It would appear as if there were different stages of the Homeric poems, presenting different versions at different periods. There was the original stage of the *Iliad* before the age of Peisistratos, in whose time a public rehearsal of the poems is said (on rather doubtful authority) to have been established, the license of the rhapsodists checked, and the poems themselves re-arranged. These were probably the original versions of the older part. The Homer of the early period was, doubtless, a poet of great genius, but one who composed his epic verses in the rude and imperfect Greek of that period, in the same way as the poems of Chaucer were composed in the imperfect English of his age. Then came revisions by Theagnes of Rhegium, by Stesimbrotos of Thasos, and at a later period by Antimachus of Colophon, himself a poet of some celebrity. The version used by Aristotle shows some remarkable differences from our text, while the numerous quotations made by Plato agree, in nearly every instance, with the present text. The present division into 24 Books of unequal length is attributed to Aristarchus, about 156 B.C.\*

\* "I admire Homer more than ever, but I am now quite sure that the *Iliad* is a piece of mosaic made very skilfully, long after his time, out of several of his lays, with bits here and there of compositions of inferior minstrels."—*Lord Macaulay's Life*, vol. ii, p. 296.

"As for the Epic, I confess myself as a heretic as to Homer: I look upon the *Iliad* as a remnant of national songs. The wise ones agree that the *Odyssey* is the work of a later age: my instinct agrees with the result of their researches, I credit their conclusion."—*D'Israeli. Venetia*.



Considering, therefore, the strong evidence we have before us, there is the greatest probability in favour of the view that our present Homer is the modernized version of more ancient poems by some poet of the time of Plato, in the same way as the older poems of Chaucer have been modernized by Dryden and Wordsworth, and as Tennyson has given modern versions in his *Idylls of the King* of the older poems of King Arthur and the Round Table.

The *Iliad* of Homer, we have every reason to believe, is a pure myth, or as Mr. Grote expresses it, "essentially a legend," a composition solely inspired by the muse:—Achilles' wrath: Heavenly Goddess sing.

Historic Ilium, if we admit the existence of such a town, was only a peg used by Homer to hang his poem on. "Troy herself," says Philostratus, "would never have been had not Homer lived, he was really the founder of Troy." The Troy or Ilion of the Homeric poems was, as Mr. Paley writes, "more or less a mythical city."

Professor Jebb also shares the same view. "The poet's town of Troy," he writes, "was a creation of his fancy, influenced by handsome cities of his own time." A writer in the *Edinburgh Review* adopts a similar opinion: "The Troy of the *Iliad* is in truth a city of the poet's fancy, and all attempts at precise identification are dreams."

In seeking for the Troy of Homer amid the ruins of Ilium Novum, we are only following a mirage.\* In Homer we have the description of a splendid and sacred city, with spacious streets, a palace containing fifty rooms, lofty walls and wide gates, and a temple of Athene in the Acropolis; yet all this is a mirage, an unsubstantial pageant, which had never any existence, except in the brain of Homer. The whole *Iliad* is but a splendid

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\* Unless, perhaps, as Mr. Paley has remarked, the latest Homeric descriptions were based on a knowledge of the later city.

mirage glowing with all the hues of a gorgeous imagination. It is a pure fiction from beginning to end. It is a mistake, as Mr. Grote writes, to apply to Homer and to the Homeric Siege of Troy, criticisms, which would be perfectly just if brought to bear on the Athenian Siege of Syracuse, as described by Thucydides, in the Peloponnesian war,—but which are not more applicable to the epic narrative than they would be to the exploits of Amadis or Orlando. The words of Thucydides would seem to imply that the siege of Troy was not the great siege as described by Homer, and that it was indebted for its fame to the poets, for he says that the siege “is shown by facts to have been inferior to its fame, and to the present report of it, which has prevailed by the means of poets.”

Professor Sayce's remarks on Dr. Schliemann's discoveries at Hissarlik confirm this view. “Hissarlik,” he writes, “does not satisfy all the requirements of Homeric Troy. It is too small in the first place, capable of containing at most a population of 3000; secondly, what Dr. Schliemann calls the Scæan gate is in the wrong position, and would not have led toward the Greek camp.” “It is clear,” he adds, “that Homer's description of Troy is more or less an idealized combination of several sites, since the twin sources of the Scamander, which are made to rise outside of the city walls, are really miles away at the foot of Ida.”

Professor Jebb, who has lately carefully examined the remains discovered at Hissarlik, comes to the same conclusion. “The town of Troy,” he writes, “cannot be recognized in any remains found at Hissarlik.” The remains discovered at Hissarlik in the stratum identified by Dr. Schliemann with the Troy of Homer, do not in any way present to us the same state of the arts and manners, the same conditions of life, as those presented in the *Iliad*. The remains discovered at Hissarlik, as Mr. Gladstone says, exhibit no works of art so advanced as the belt, brooch, armour of Agamemnon, or, above all, as the shield of Achilles. The attempts at delineating life upon the “idols” of Hissarlik are either doubtful or of the most elementary kind; and can



hardly be said to represent form, but rather certain rudiments of form.

A letter in *The Times*, by one who has seen the excavations at Hissarlik, gives the following: "The net result is that at Hissarlik we have only one prehistoric settlement of any importance, and above it the historic Greek Ilium in at least three successive phases—Roman, Macedonian, Greek. As to the prehistoric city being Homer's Troy, scholars and archæologists are pretty well agreed as to the futility of looking for the stones or bricks of the city described in the 'Iliad.' The legend of Troy was probably founded on a real siege, but when the particular buildings described by the poet are traced on the earth, then some enterprising aeronaut may expect to find the remains of Nephelo coccygia in stratified clouds."—*Times*, Jan. 29th, 1883.\*

The events of the Greek heroical world were mere myths springing from the creative imagination of the Greek mind. As Mr. Grote writes: "The curious and imaginative Greek, whenever he did not find a recorded past, was uneasy till he had created one."

As for Agamemnon, Achilles, and other heroes of the Trojan war, they must be relegated to the region of myth. It is remarkable indeed that even Thucydides speaks of them, as of Pelops, Theseus, and others, as historical characters; but this only shows how long history lingered on the confines of fable. Among all nations there was at an early age a mythical period, when legendary kings and heroes were brought into prominence. In England we have, as told by Geoffrey of Monmouth, the legend

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\* Dr. Schliemann seems to have abandoned his original view—that he discovered the Troy of Homer at Hissarlik—in his latest work on Troy, "Troja." "Dr. Schliemann," writes a reviewer in *The Quarterly* (Jan., 1884), "justly claims to have revealed,—not the very Troy of Homer, that is, such a city as any one with a sense of poetry must know that the poet or poets of the 'Iliad' created by investing the circumstances of their own age with the forms of imagination,—but, as he is careful to show in the title of his third chapter, as throughout his book, the *primeval city whose fate gave birth to the Homeric legend.*"

of Brutus, the son of Æneas, coming into England, and his descendants, Cymbeline and Lear. It would be as useless to quote the authority of Homer and the Greek tragic poets to prove the existence of Agamemnon and Achilles as it would be to quote Geoffrey of Monmouth, or Shakespeare, to prove the existence of Brutus and his Trojans, and King Lear.

I now come to the special object of this paper,—my doubts of the antiquity of the Homeric poems, from the evident knowledge they exhibit of a high and advanced stage of the art of sculpture, doubtless of the Periclean age, and of other arts.

The Homeric poems tell us little positively, but much negatively, with regard to art. Very few statues are noticed in the Iliad: a statue of Athené is mentioned at Ilium, upon whose knees the Priestess Theano placed a magnificent peplos:\* it would appear from this that the statue was in a sitting position, like some early statues of Athené, and the statues at Branchidæ. But the knowledge of a higher order of statues may be inferred from several other passages in the Iliad; one, in particular, we may specially notice.

In describing Agamemnon Homer says hé was

*ὄμματα καὶ κεφαλὴν ἕκλος Διὶ τερπικεραύνῳ*  
*"Ἀρεΐ δὲ ζώνην, στέρνον δὲ Ποσειδάωνι.*

Whence did Homer derive these images? The Greeks of the ninth century could not have had any abstract conception of the features and forms of the gods, nor had they the power of expressing the human form, even in its most ordinary variations. The likeness must therefore be to some image or representation of these gods; and none but some great sculptor could have made a statue or image which gave such grand features and head to Jupiter; such a noble breast to Neptune. Sculpture must have

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\* This was evidently an Athenian custom, and could only be applied to statues of goddesses of the type of the seated statue by Endœus, a sculptor who flourished about 560 B.C. A stone statue of this type was found in the Acropolis.

improved so far as to seize the external forms of life in their fullest beauty, and peculiar features and form must have been fixed for each god.\* There must have been some well-known representation statues of Zeus, Ares, and Neptune, to whose grand features and forms Homer alludes here,† and these gods must have been distinguished, not by attributes, as in the early period, such as a thunderbolt, a trident, &c., but by peculiar features and forms; as Col. Leake remarks, “the gods were distinguished from one another, among the Athenians, more by countenance, attitude, and form, than by symbols.” Statues which would give adequate ideas of these grand conceptions of their gods could not have been in existence before the time of Myron, Polycletus, and Phidias; the countenance, figures, and attributes, indeed, of the Greek gods were not fixed until the age of Polycletus and Phidias. No wooden figures of Dædalus could have suggested such images. The types of Zeus and Athené, as conceived by Homer, are in complete harmony with the conceptions of the gods and goddesses which Phidias embodied in sculpture.

Such conceptions of the deities Zeus, Athené, Heré, as occur in Homer, could only be produced in an age when the Athené

\* So the pseudo-Anacreon, in describing the beauties of Bathyllus, selects the most beautiful parts of the body from various pictures, the parts for which the pictures were remarkable. He takes the neck from an Adonis, the head and hands from a Mercury, the thighs from Pollux, the belly from a Bacchus. As the pseudo-Anacreon took these ideas of the perfections of the parts of his body from famous pictures which he had seen, so Homer must have taken his idea of the perfections of the different parts of Agamemnon from some celebrated statues which he had seen.

† From a passage in Pausanias (II, 24, 4) it is evident that the early Greek sculptors had a very different idea of Zeus from what Homer gives. He notices in the Larissa of Argos a carved image of Zeus with three eyes, one in the middle of his forehead. This Jove, they say, Pausanias tells us, was the family Jove of Laomedon, which had its place in the open court of his palace; and when Troy was taken by the Greeks, it was to the altar of this Jove that Priam fled. But when the spoils were divided, this image fell to the lot of Sthenelus, the son of Capaneus, who dedicated it in this place.

and Zeus of Phidias, and the Heré of Polycletus, were embodied in Chryselephantine material. This will appear most striking when we compare the Athené of Phidias with the early attempts at the representation of the goddess, as we can judge from the remains of statues which have come down to us of the sixth century B.C., such as the Athené in the metope of Selinus, which is so rude as to be incapable of affording the slightest motive for a lofty, ideal conception of the goddess, such as we find it in Homer. Homer's ideal Athené is also quite at variance with the Athené of early Greek tradition, who was represented as harsh and elderly.

The statues of the seventh century B.C. were rude and coarse, with scarcely any defined feature of the human countenance or of the human form, and never could have given any lofty ideas of the gods. The Apollo of Amyclæ in the sixth century B.C. was only a pillar, to which head, arms, and feet were attached. How could Homer, of the ninth century B.C., have drawn the ideal types of the eyes, the breast, and waist of a god from such a statue?

We have two inconsistent and conflicting views before us: on one side the known rudeness of the Greek art of the ninth century; and on the other the Homeric description of a high state of art in the same century which could conceive such a work as the shield of Achilles.

A most significant fact is that on the older vases Athené is quite indistinguishable from an ordinary female, while in the subsequent ones she appears wearing a helmet, ægis, and lance, as she is described by Homer.

Can we believe that if we are to take the rude Athené of the metope of Selinus, or the equally rude Athené of Endœus, or that of the early painted vases, as types of the ideal conceptions of the goddess by the sculptors and painters of the sixth century, that a poet of the ninth could embody in verse such a wonderful conception as the Glaukopis Athené,\* with her

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\* Lord Lytton, in his "Athens" (I, 38), remarks the little resemblance there is between the formal and elderly goddess of Dædalian sculpture and the



helmet, lance, and dread ægis surrounded by a hundred tassels, as described by Homer in the *Iliad*? The Homeric conception of Athené is most obviously in strict harmony with the embodiment of the goddess in the Chryselephantine statue of Phidias, or of the great bronze image of Athenè Promachus of the same date, which stood erect on the Capitol.

We shall quote the following description of Athené from the V. book of the *Iliad*:

“ Now heaven’s dread arms her mighty limbs invest,  
 Jove’s cuirass blazes on her ample breast,  
 Decked in sad triumph for the mournful field,  
 O’er her broad shoulders hangs his horrid shield,  
 Dire, black, tremendous ! Round the margin rolled,  
 A fringe of serpents, hissing, guards the gold.  
 Here all the terrors of grim war appear,  
 Here rages Force, here tremble Flight and Fear,  
 Here stormed Contention, and here Fury frowned ;  
 And the dire orb portenting Gorgon crowned.  
 The massy golden helm she next assumes,  
 That, dreadful, nods with four o’ershading plumes,  
 So vast, the broad circumference contains  
 A hundred armies on a hundred plains.  
 The goddess thus th’ imperial car ascends,  
 Shook by her arm, the mighty javelin bends  
 Ponderous and huge ; that, when her fury burns,  
 Proud tyrants humbles, and whole hosts o’eturns.”

*Pope’s Translation.*

Can we conceive such a magnificent description of the goddess was suggested by the rude and clumsy statues of Athené before the fifth century? Is not such poetry the evident composition of some Athenian rhapsodist or some Ionian poet, who derived his conception of his Glaucopis Athené, with her lofty helmet, ægis, shield, and lance, from the statue of Athené by Phidias in the

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glorious and august Glaucopis of Homer—the maiden of celestial beauty as of unrivalled wisdom.

Acropolis? I may ask another question: How is it that, if such a conception as this of Homer's was produced and was prevalent in the ninth century, no sculptor of the sixth century, or early vase painter, represented Athené with a helmet, shield, ægis, and lance? No figure of Athené with these accompaniments appears in Greek art before the fifth century.

The rude works of Greek sculpture of the ninth century could never have suggested to the author of the *Iliad* the allusions to the eyes and head of Zeus, to the waist of Ares, or to the breast of Neptune, or lead to the conception of the grand Glaucopis Athené of the *Iliad*.

If we are to believe that Homer describes works of art from experience of those which he had seen, the description of the shield of Achilles must be assigned to a much later date than the ninth century. No Greek artist of that age could have conceived or executed so grand and so important a work. The compositions taking up the band going round the shield would have required the inventive powers of a Phidias or his pupils, and could only be carried out by the artists who executed the frieze of the Parthenon.\* Another obvious remark is that the subjects are essentially and purely Greek of a late date,—the form of the trial is the Attic *Δωμωσία*, the agricultural, pastoral, and vintage scenes are all Greek such as we see depicted on painted vases of the fifth century. His description of a scene in which they are leading brides from their homes with blazing torches, women standing at their doors looking on, well pleased, finds its counterpart on a vase figured in Panofka (*Antike Leben*, Pl. XI, 3). The scene of a lion attacking a bull occurs on a coin of Acanthus of about the middle of the fifth century. The boy with clear toned

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\* On a painted vase which represents Achilles and Ajax playing at the modern game of *morra*, the shield of Achilles is represented with a mask in the centre, in the upper part a serpent, and in the lower a leopard. The vase dates about 500 B.C. The conception of the shield as described by Homer must consequently be of a much later period.



lute, singing sweetly in the midst of fair maids and blooming youths, is a pure Greek custom. The dance of young men and maids with joined hands may be compared with the dancing figures on painted vases of the fourth century (see Panofka, Pl. IX, 5).

The chorus which Homer describes, he says, was like that which "once in wide Knossos Dædalus produced for fair-haired Ariadne." Now evidently Homer refers to some well known work of art, perhaps a bas-relief, in the style of the well-top found at Corinth by Dodwell, which dates about 600 B.C. Pausanias (IX, 40) mentions that the Bæotians have a representation of the dance of Ariadne, which is mentioned by Homer in the *Iliad*, and this is made of white stone. It was considered a work of Dædalus. This allusion of Homer to a work of the so-called Dædalus, which could not possibly date earlier than the sixth century, further proves the late date of the poem.

"The chorus described by Homer," writes Colonel Mure, "as sculptured on one of the compartments of the shield of Achilles, corresponds in all essential particulars, as has been remarked by the best classical authorities, to the hyporchematic dance, as that dance was performed in every subsequent age of Greek antiquity, and as still performed by the native peasantry of various parts of Greece on days of popular festivity."\*

Some have thought to put forward a proof of the antiquity of the Homeric poems by attempting to point out an analogy between the Phœnician bowls or pateræ found at Palestrina and Cyprus\* and the shield of Achilles; but there is no analogy whatever between the scenes engraved on those pseudo-archaic, semi-Egyptian, and semi-Assyrian bowls, and the reliefs on the shield of Achilles. The continuous scenes and compositions in bands around the shield are, as we have shown, a series composed

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\* So thoroughly Greek is everything in the *Iliad*, that the Palladium of Troy is generally represented on Greek vases and gems as a statue of Athené in the early Greek style.

of Greek life and manners, having nothing in common with the scenes engraved on the Phœnician bowls. Those on the shield of Achilles are such as are frequently represented on the cylices or painted vases of the fourth century. The cover of the Dodwell vase, with the hunt of the boar of Calydon, might give us a faint idea of how these compositions on the shield were arranged in a circular manner. There is also a cup, with name of the maker—Tleson, with the same hunt, and the nuptial dance of Ariadne. Flaxman, with the true appreciation of the Greek spirit of the compositions, has produced a wonderful reproduction of this shield in the pure Phidian and Greek style. I am sorry to see Mr. Murray has made such a mistake as to restore the shield after the manner of that compound mixture of Egyptian and Assyrian on the Phœnician pateræ, so totally out of character with the pure Greek spirit of the composition as described in Homer. The restoration harmonizes neither with the beauty and spirit of Homer's poetry, nor with the Hellenic designs, like those of the Greek painted vases, which correspond most nearly with such incidents as Homer describes. Lastly, Ocean being wrought as a circular stream forming the margin or border of the shield, shows the shield was round. It may have been represented by the wave scroll pattern so frequently introduced on vases of the fifth and fourth centuries.†

Some would assign a Phœnician influence on the beginnings of Greek art, but the most important characteristic of the Greek mind was the originality of its inventive genius. It had no model in inventing epic poetry, the drama, lyric poetry, and

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\* It is an important fact with regard to these Phœnician works of art that none of them have been found in Greece. According to Professor Helbig, these pateræ found at Palestrina and Cyprus date about the latter part of the sixth century. The Palestrina treasure he attributes to the Carthaginians.

† The cap on the head of Ulysses, in a bust belonging to Lord Bristol, bears the wave scroll round it, evidently in allusion to his sea voyages.

philosophy; why, then, should we refuse the same principle of originality to the Greek mind in the art of sculpture, of all arts the one which appears almost spontaneous in its origin in all countries.

In Book XXIV, 615, Homer refers to the stone figure of Niobe on Mount Sipylus: judging from the engraving of it in Stewart's *Lydia*, it presents nothing archaic. It is thus described by Stewart: "The figure of Niobe is designed in a sufficiently easy and natural attitude: the hands appear to have been clasped together upon the breast, and the head is slightly inclined on one side, with a pensive air expressive of grief." This figure cannot be of an earlier date than the latter end of the sixth century B.C., later than the seated statues of Branchidæ. The earliest known examples of Greek sculpture are the metopes of Selinus, about 600 B.C., and the art of them is not only rude, but almost grotesque.

It has been observed, "from the date of the historical notices of sculptors backward to that usually assigned to the Homeric poems, there is an interval of several centuries, during which it would appear that the art of sculpture had made no sensible advance—if indeed it had not declined: this being improbable, explanations have been endeavoured to be found by Ulrichs in the confusion which seems to reign among the dates of the earliest sculptors;" but if we place the Homeric poems at their true period, it becomes clear that the art of the Homeric poems is the art of the fifth century B.C., or even later; that Greek art had its regular and successive stages of development, beginning in the seventh century, and consequently that a fallow interval between the art of the twelfth and fifth centuries is purely imaginary.

Works in metallurgy are mentioned with much detail in Homer; such as the ornamentation of cuirasses, the shield of Achilles: these were works in relief, put together like the fragments of the chariot from Perugia in the British Museum, and hammered up (*σφυρελατα*), not cast in the lump; all such being

evidences of the art of a later date than that generally assigned to the age of Homer. The employment of various metals in the shield is far beyond the art of the ninth century in Greece: the gods Pallas and Ares are golden and clad in golden armour; black clusters of grapes hang from vines supported by silver props. The watery moat of the vineyard is azure; the fence that encloses it is of tin; the colours of the oxen are diversified by gold and tin; and the dancing youths, draped in delicate, glistening chitons, have swords of gold pendant from silver belts.

Now we are told by both Pliny and Pausanias that the art of casting metals was not discovered until the sixth century by Rhœcus and Theodorus;\* while the invention of soldering metals is attributed to Glaucus of Chios, who flourished about 490 B.C. The earliest instance we have of the soldering of different metals is the famous work of Glaucus;—a silver bowl with an iron base, which was presented to the temple of Delphi by Alyattes, King of Lydia.

The art and science of Homer is the art and science of the Greeks of the age of Pericles. Dress, armour, chariots, walls with their battlements and barred wooden gates, are all the same as those found on vases subsequent to 560 B.C.: on the painted vase at Naples which represents the death of Priam, we have the heroes of the mythic period of the siege of Troy represented in the dresses and armour of the fifth century, completely coinciding with the figure of the Greek warrior in full armour sculptured on the stele of Aristion, which was doubtless the tombstone of a warrior who had died at Marathon.

Mr. Paley has shown that the early painted vases, where they represent groups and scenes connected with the Troica, exhibit non-Homeric subjects, while it is only on the later vases that our Homer begins to appear. This is confirmed by the high

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\* A wonderful golden vine, with bunches of grapes imitated by means of the most costly precious stones, is mentioned by Herodotus, and was said to have been the work of Theodorus (560 B.C.)



authority of Dr. Birch. "It is most remarkable and significant that scarcely one of the vases which issued from the kilns prior to the Peloponnesian war is decorated with a subject which can be satisfactorily identified with the incidents of the Iliad and Odyssey; while the few vase-paintings which are undoubtedly Homeric are almost all of the third style, with red figures, and executed in the interval between the war of the Peloponnese and the landing of Pyrrhus in Italy." Mr. Paley further makes a remark of great significance. "It certainly is a fact of great interest in itself, that the scenes from our Homer are nearly confined to gems, cameos, and bas-reliefs of late art." Thus the evidence of the vase-painters coincides with that of the dramatists, in ignoring the text that has come down to us from Platonic times as "Homer."

There is also another matter which would awaken doubts in the mind of the archæologist; Homer mentions the walls of the palace of Priam as being built with polished stone, *ξεστοῖο λίθοιο*: from what we know of the walls built in Greece, or in Grecian colonies, the style of masonry in the ninth century was either Cyclopean or Pelasgian or polygonal; no walls of cut and polished stone existed in Greece until a much later date.

Homer dilates on the splendour of the palaces in which the kings lived. Lofty and spacious, of stone without, and covered within with plates of bronze, they gleam over the land like the sun and moon, and are filled with riches of gold, silver, and iron in prodigious abundance. He describes, as Col. Mure, writes, "spacious mansions adorned with colonnades, gilding, statuary, and pleasure grounds." Are these descriptions consistent with the rude state of Greek civilization and art in the ninth century? Are these descriptions confirmed by the rude remains of a pre-historic city discovered at Hissarlik by Dr. Schliemann, and identified by him with the Troy of Homer? There is no evidence to prove such luxurious, spacious, and magnificent palaces ever existed in those early periods in Greece: as Professor Jebb writes, "the poet's buildings were fancy born."

Thucydides describes the cities of early times in Greece as having neither sumptuous temples nor public buildings, but being built as villages (I, 10). He also mentions Mycenæ as a small place. "Thucydides," writes Mr. Grote, "represents the earliest Greeks as living universally in unfortified villages, chiefly on account of their poverty, rudeness, and thorough carelessness for the morrow. He compares them to the mountaineers of Ætolia and of the Ozolian Lokris in his own time, who dwelt in their unfortified hill villages, with little or no intercommunication, always armed and fighting, and subsisting on the produce of their cattle and their woods,—clothed in undressed hides, and eating raw meat." "The Homeric poems, however," observes Mr. Grote, "present to us a different picture. They recognize walled towns, fixed abodes, strong local attachments, hereditary individual property in land, vineyards planted and carefully cultivated, established temples of the gods, and splendid palaces of chiefs. Ilium, or Troy, represents the perfection of Homeric society. It is a consecrated spot, containing temples of the gods, as well as the palace of Priam, and surrounded by walls which are the fabric of the gods." These pictures from the Homeric poems present a state of society and a stage of magnificence and splendour totally inconsistent and at variance with the state of society in Greece, as described by Thucydides, at the alleged date of the Homeric age.

The epic dialect was one peculiar to itself, kept alive and distinct by a school of rhapsodists till quite a late period, and after that perpetuated by the Alexandrine imitators in their post-Christian followers. The characteristics of this dialect were an affected archaism, the employment of old words, often in an incorrect sense, and the use of set phrases and formulæ more or less faithfully retained from the remote past.

The walls and tombs at Mycenæ and Argos have been attributed to mythic kings commemorated by Homer: why may they not be more justly given to the historical kings of Argos, in the middle of the eighth century, of whom Phidon is the most prominent in



history? The historical kings of Argos have been completely hidden from view by the prominence given to the mythical kings.

The Greeks of the early centuries of Greek history were, as we have shown, in a very low state of civilization; indeed, there is no trace of civilization in Greece earlier than the seventh century; it is therefore absurd to attribute the refined civilization we find in the *Iliad* to the twelfth century, when the Greeks of that age were in a low and barbarous state. The Greeks of the heroic age, as depicted in the *Iliad* of Homer, were purely fictitious beings. The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are altogether ideal pictures of past times which never had any existence. The whole system of Greek society as given by Homer is either as imaginary as the state of society in the times of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, as drawn by Sir Thomas Malory or by Mr. Tennyson, or it is the outcome of a knowledge of the civilization of quite a late age. Taking the Homeric picture of society and manners as genuine representations of the state of society in Greece in the twelfth century would be as absurd as to take the representations of society and manners in the romance of King Arthur as genuine pictures of the manners and customs of the Britons of the sixth century A.D., who were then in a barbarous state. Dr. Birch, in a private letter to me, adopts a similar view. His words are: "Homer, in my opinion, was not of the ninth century, and his Troy is a Greek description of a later period. The weapons and civilization he describes appear to me about the sixth century B.C. No doubt there were Greeks in the eleventh century B.C., but their civilization did not reach the Homeric standard."

In conclusion, I must say that all these doubts do not in any way detract from the beauty and power of the great Homeric poems. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are still unassailable as the greatest productions of human genius in any country. We may go further, and say that Homer is charming, beautiful, artistic, just because it is really the composition (or compilation) of an advanced, a philosophic, an artistic, and a civilized age.

As a comparison of the development and compilation of the mediæval epics with the Homeric suggests some remarkable analogies, and may throw some light on their development, and may also lead to form a more correct view of the age of the Homeric poems (as from the analogy with them we may draw the inference that our Homer is only a later version of more ancient ballads), I give the following short account of the origin and development of some of the mediæval epics of Germany, France, and Spain.

In the earlier portion of the middle ages—for the ninth century seems to have been a fallow interval between two cycles of civilization, marking the close of one cycle and the beginning of another—we find a phase of European mind similar to that of the age of Homer, when it returned to something like the simple faith and creative imagination of earlier times in Greece. The same phase of mind and the same stage of civilization gave birth to a profusion of legends of saints and knights; they produced the counterpart of the tales of Hercules and Theseus, of the wanderings of Ulysses, and the Argonautic expedition, in the shape of romances of chivalry. Like the Homeric poems, the romances announced themselves as true narratives, and were down to the fourteenth century popularly believed as such. Achilles and Theseus have their counterparts in Amadis and Lancelot; the Argonautic expedition in the expedition of Charlemagne. The majority of these romances relate to personages altogether fictitious. Amadis and Lancelot we are in no wise called on to believe, and of King Arthur, as of King Agamemnon, we have no means of ascertaining if he really existed or not. “The exploits of many of these romantic heroes,” Mr. Grote writes, “resemble in several points those of the Grecian: the adventures of Perseus, Achilles, Odysseus,

Atalanta, Bellerophon, Jason, and the Trojan war, or the Argonautic expedition generally, would have fitted in perfectly to the Carlovingian or other epics of the period. Altogether, the state of mind of the hearers seems in both cases to have been much the same,—eager for emotion and sympathy, and receiving any narrative attuned to their feeling, not merely with hearty welcome, but also with unsuspecting belief.”

The best mediæval romances that have come down to our times are of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. They may be divided into two classes. These are the popular epics (called by the French *Chansons de Geste*), which were chanted by *jongleurs* and other strolling singers: and the more artificial poems, and prose Arthurian romances, which were composed for the courts of kings or barons. Both classes are founded upon older lays of national or local heroes, mingled (especially in the German poems) with myths of heathendom. The singers were in the habit of stringing the scattered lays together, and connecting them with long passages of their own; and hence arose a series of epics that grouped themselves around some favourite hero, and formed a cycle of romance. Most of the German heroic poems and Carlovingian *chansons* belong to this first class; the Arthurian legends, on the other hand, only remain in the shape of regular compositions.

In these popular epics we cannot but see a great analogy to the Homeric poems, not only in their process of composition and mode of development, but also in the manner in which they were chanted by *jongleurs*, who merely recited the songs composed by troubadours or bards, in which they bear a great similarity to the rhapsodists, who recited the poems or songs composed by the earlier *oidoi* or bards.

In Germany we also find a similar distinction between the minnesingers and the wandering minstrels, as between the *oidoi* and the rhapsodists. “The minnesinger recited songs and odes of his own composition, to his own accompaniment on the viol; and as few of the minnesingers could write, their compositions

were preserved by verbal tradition only, and carried by wandering minstrels from castle to castle throughout Germany."

From the following extract from *The Saturday Review*, which describes the mode of composition of the *Chanson de Roland*, it would appear a similar law prevailed in the composition of great national epics in other countries. "Of the three principal cycles of the *Chanson de Geste*, the earliest and best are those which have the great King Carl as their central figure, and of these the earliest and best is the *Chanson de Roland*. The origin of the song may, according to a theory in itself by no means improbable, be looked for in those *Cantilenes*, a collection of which was formed by Karl, and in which the French sang the prowess of their warriors. Each of these cantilenes, of which none in the original form survive, celebrated one exploit; it was short, direct in diction, and rapid in movement; the compiler of the *chanson* had his materials ready to his hand in story and in verse; he filled out the principal characters, he took as much of the latter as was apt to his purpose, and amplified the descriptions; where his predecessors mentioned a fight, he described it; when they spoke of valorous deeds, he told them in detail. The later MSS. of the *Roland Song*, for instance, are full of expansions, additions, and *remaniements*."

This description bears a striking analogy to what must have taken place in regard to the compilation and development of the *Iliad*, for that poem is nothing but a *Chanson d'Achille*, compiled, amplified, and filled out from earlier *cantilenes*. The *Iliad*, as we now have it, is also full of expansions, additions, and *remaniements*.

"Those songs of the German bards," Schlegel writes, "which Charlemagne caused to be collected and committed to writing, could scarcely have been anything else than similar heroic poems relating to the first Christian period and the great expedition of the northern tribes. He was to the German bards what Solon was to Homer, or the *Homeridæ*. Now we have still extant heroic poems in the German language, wherein Attila, Odoacer,



Theodorick, and the race of the Amali are celebrated, in conjunction with many heroes, both Frankish and Burgundian, all mingled together without scruple by the bold anachronism of a most uncritical age. The present shape in which these poems appear bears, indeed, the clearest marks of an age long posterior to that of Charlemagne. But perhaps it is not too much to say that we have still in our possession, if not the language or form, at least the substance, of many of those ancient poems which were collected by the orders of that prince: I refer to the *Nibelungen Lied*, and the collection which goes by the name of the *Heldenbuch*."

Like the *Iliad*, "the *Nibelungen* is peculiarly distinguished by its unity of plan: it is a picture, or rather a series of successive pictures, each naturally following the other, and all delineated with great boldness and simplicity, and a total disregard of all superfluities. It is, moreover, a poem abounding in variety; in it both sides of human life, the joyful as well as the sorrowful, are depicted in all their strength. The promise of the opening stanzas is fulfilled:

‘I sing of loves and wassailings, if ye will lend your ears;  
Of bold men’s bloody combatings, and gentle ladies’ tears.’

Its external structure is extremely regular and masterly. It has an almost dramatic conclusion, and is divided into six books; these again are subdivided into smaller sections, cantos or rhapsodies, with a view, it is probable. According to Schlegel, the *Nibelungen Lied* was not, in all probability, reduced to its present form before the beginning of the thirteenth century."

According to Grimm’s and Lachman’s critical analysis of the poem, the *Nibelungen Lied* is a compilation of pre-existing songs and rhapsodies, strung together into one whole upon a plan remarkable for its grand simplicity, although less skill is shown in some instances in the manner in which the several parts are connected.

Another point of analogy between these heroic poems and

the Homeric is that these were not, certainly in the older times, ever committed to writing; that was totally contrary both to the spirit of such compositions and the customs of those who recited them. They were evidently still left to oral tradition, even after the Germans had been long connected with the Romans, and lived in society with them in many different countries, and been put in complete possession both of alphabets and all the materials of writing.

The German minnesingers could not write: their compositions were handed down by oral tradition, and were recited by wandering minstrels, who carried them from castle to castle. Among the Hindoos, also, the Vedas were transmitted, not by writing, but by constant oral repetition.

We may point out here another analogy between the Nibelungen Lied and the Homeric poems which has been suggested to us. We are told that among the German bards of this period, the inventor of a new metre had, as it were, the sole copyright of it; and that Kurenberger, who invented the metre in which the Nibelungen Lied is composed, was thus considered the author of the poem. Thus, perhaps, Homer was the original inventor of the epic or hexameter verse, and consequently all poems composed in that verse were placed under his name. Hence the number of poems attributed to him—not only the Iliad and Odyssey, but also the Batrachomyomachia, the Hymn to Apollo, Margites, etc.,—all poems in hexameter verse.

In the romance of the Cid we find a further analogy to the Homeric poems. This poem grew out of a series of ballads, in which tradition has assembled round a single name some stories originally distinct, and attributed to one man the great deeds of many. In this romance, the oldest monument of Spanish literature, the popular imagination has developed the Cid into a type. The Spanish nation is to some extent personified in this legendary hero. It has made him after its own image, embellished and idealized. In the same way the Ulysses of Homer is the Greek personified, exhibiting all his intellectual keenness, his

craft, his versatility, his invention, and also his courage and perseverance as a warrior.

The compilation and development of the Nibelungen Lied and the poem of the Cid may thus afford a key to the mode in which the Homeric poems were developed, their origin and compilation presenting many analogies.

We may further bring these analogies more home to us by adducing the romance of King Arthur and the ballads of Robin Hood as further illustrations of the mode in which the Homeric poems were developed. King Arthur forms the central figure of the romance of the Round Table. Wonderful achievements, all the offspring of a fertile imagination, are attributed to this prince and his knights. Geoffry of Monmouth wrote a work, producing all the romantic adventures of Arthur: this work, apparently, gave birth to a multitude of fictions, which came to be considered as quasi-historical traditions. From these, exaggerated by each succeeding age and re-cast by each narrator, sprang the famous metrical romances of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, first in French, and afterwards in English, from which notions of Arthur are derived. All the chivalry and romance of the poems of King Arthur are ideal pictures of past times which never existed. The Britons of the sixth century, when King Arthur was supposed to have lived, were in a low and barbarous state, and hence it is impossible such chivalry and such courtly knights could have existed in that age.\*

The collection of ballads entitled "Robin Hood's Garland" has a certain unity, depicting the life and death of this bold outlaw. They are chiefly modernized versions of more ancient ballads, and are probably the work of various hands.

To conclude, we quote the following passage from *The Quarterly Review*, which shows that the same law in the development of myths and heroic legends, until they culminate in the

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\* We may as well look for traces of the Court of King Arthur at Caer-leon as look for the Troy of Homer at Hissarlik.

more perfect epic poem, is carried out independently in separate countries. It gives the result of Mr. Burnouf's comparison of parallel epochs of literature in three countries. "Of the three great epopees—the Greek, the Indian, and the Frankish,—the two whose formation is known are shown by Mr. Burnouf to have followed the same law. Rude songs celebrating the ancient gods and heroes are as old as the Germanic races: they were composed before and after the battle by chieftains themselves. In the eleventh century they are transformed by a gradual and spontaneous process into longer poetical compositions, bearing the name of *Chansons de geste*, and sung by jongleurs to the accompaniment of a simple lute and guitar. The subjects are still in the main historical, adding to the reality only the expression of popular enthusiasm, and the simple admiration which transforms men into heroes. The same development took place in the remotest part of the Indo-European world. A caste, that of the Sutas, filled the place of the Western jongleurs, and sang *chansons de geste* under the name of *Purānas*. Again, in both countries, as poetical workmanship grew more skilful, the simple reality of the early poems began to pall upon the national taste. The result was, in the French cycle, the class of *Romans d'Aventures*; in the Indian, that of *Kāvyas*. In these, as time went on, imagination more and more supplanted the sobrieties of history. Applying these facts to the analogous circumstances of Greek epic, Mr. Burnouf has little difficulty in deciding that the 'Iliad' is a *chanson de geste*, the 'Odyssey' a *roman d'aventures*." The writer remarks further, that the Iliad represents the culmination of a great school of poetry, while the ballad minstrelsy of Greece out of which it grew belongs to an earlier epoch in the development of poetry in Greece. The Odyssey, with its superiority in symmetry and finish, and its inferiority in force and freshness, bears evidence of a later date than the Iliad.

Having thus given a description of the development of the French, German, and Spanish mediæval epics, we may draw the



inference from the striking analogy which exists in the development of these epics with that of the Homeric poems, that there is strongest reason to conclude that Homer in its present state is only a compilation and a later version of earlier poems, probably, as Mr. Paley suggests, of the time of Plato.

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